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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 MOSCOW 15118

E.O. 12356: DECL:OADR
TAGS: PREL UR IR IZ AF
SUBJECT: SOVIET REACTION TO KHOMEINI'S DEATH

REFS: (A) MOSCOW 14076, (B) STATE 176500

¶11. C-ENTIRE TEXT.

SUMMARY
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¶12. KHOMEINI'S DEATH EVOKEES IN THE MINDS OF SOVIETS THE DEATH OF STALIN. PERHAPS SIMPLY BECAUSE STALIN IS ON EVERYONE'S MINDS THESE DAYS AS THE CONGRESS OF PEOPLE'S DEPUTIES REVIEWS PAST CRIMES, SOVIET CONTACTS IN TWO SEPARATE MEETINGS WITH EMBOFFS INDEPENDENTLY BROUGHT UP THE DEAD SOVIET DICTATOR IN DESCRIBING THE CURRENT SITUATION IN IRAN: STALIN THE COMPROMISE CHOICE FOR LEADER FOLLOWING LENIN'S DEATH (LIKE KHAMENEI NOW); AND STALIN THE GIANT HISTORICAL FIGURE WHOSE SHOES NO MORTAL COULD EVER FILL (LIKE THE NOW-DEPARTED KHOMEINI).

¶13. OUR CONTACTS SUGGEST THE SOVIETS DO NOT EXPECT ANY SUDDEN CHANGES IN IRANIAN POLICY, WITH REGARD TO BILATERAL RELATIONS, IRAN-IRAQ OR AFGHANISTAN. BUT THE SOVIETS DO APPEAR TO HOPE FOR A MORE PRAGMATIC IRANIAN APPROACH TO EMERGE EVENTUALLY. ONE CONTACT RAISED THE INTRIGUING POSSIBILITY THAT A DEBATE IS UNDERWAY CONCERNING HOW EAGERLY THE SOVIETS SHOULD PURSUE IMPROVED RELATIONS WITH IRAN. FOR THE MOMENT THE SOVIET DESIRE FOR FULL NORMALIZATION REMAINS OFFICIAL POLICY, HOWEVER. THE RAFSANJANI VISIT MAY WELL BE POSTPONED BECAUSE OF THE MOURNING PERIOD, BUT NO WORD HAS BEEN RECEIVED FROM IRAN ON THIS. THE SOVIETS STILL DEFEND PROSPECTIVE ARMS SALES TO IRAN.
END SUMMARY.

¶14. EMBASSY OFFICERS MET JUNE 7 WITH MFA MIDDLE EASTERN COUNTRIES ADMINISTRATION IRAN SECTOR OFFICIAL VADIM NAZAROV AND "IZVESTIYA" DEPUTY MIDDLE EAST EDITOR ANDREY OSTALSKIY TO DISCUSS SOVIET REACTIONS TO THE DEATH OF KHOMEINI.

THE STALIN IMAGE
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¶15. BOTH NAZAROV AND OSTALSKIY, INDEPENDENTLY, FOUND THEMSELVES DRAWING ON THE IMAGE OF STALIN TO DESCRIBE CIRCUMSTANCES IN THE WAKE OF KHOMEINI'S DEATH. NAZAROV COMPARED THE SELECTION OF KHAMENEI TO SUCCEED THE AYATOLLAH AS IRAN'S SPIRITUAL LEADER TO STALIN'S SELECTION AS THE COMPROMISE CANDIDATE OVER OTHER, MORE FACTIONALIZED RIVALS FOLLOWING THE DEATH OF LENIN. OSTALSKIY COMPARED THE REACTION OF THE IRANIAN PEOPLE TO KHOMEINI'S DEATH TO THAT OF THE SOVIET PEOPLE FOLLOWING STALIN'S DEMISE. OSTALSKIY SAID THAT, AS WITH STALIN, THERE WOULD AT FIRST BE A PERIOD OF INTENSE MOURNING OVER KHOMEINI--"BUT LATER WOULD COME A RE-EVALUATION". OSTALSKIY SUGGESTED THE SOVIETS WERE HOPING THIS RE-EVALUATION WOULD RESULT IN THE ADOPTION OF A MORE PRAGMATIC COURSE BY THE IRANIAN LEADERSHIP.

REACTIONS, PERSONAL AND OFFICIAL
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¶16. NAZAROV SUGGESTED THAT, SPEAKING PERSONALLY, HE AND MANY SOVIETS WERE NOT SORRY TO SEE KHOMEINI

DEPART THE SCENE. KHOMEINI'S REGIME HAD DESTROYED MANY LIVES AND VIOLATED MANY STANDARDS OF INTERNATIONAL BEHAVIOR.

¶17. THE OFFICIAL SOVIET REACTION, HOWEVER--WHICH HAD TO TAKE SOVIET INTERESTS INTO ACCOUNT--NATURALLY CONSISTED OF OFFERING CONDOLENCES TO IRAN, NAZAROV SAID. GORBACHEV SENT A SHORT MESSAGE TO KHAMENEI (PUBLISHED AT THE BOTTOM OF FRONT PAGE OF THE JUNE 7 "PRAVDA"), AND SHEVARDNADZE AND FIRST DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF THE SUPREME SOVIET LUK'YANOV SIGNED THE CONDOLENCE BOOK AT THE IRANIAN EMBASSY.

IRAN DOMESTIC POLITICS
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¶18. IT WAS VERY HARD TO PREDICT WHAT WOULD HAPPEN NEXT INSIDE IRAN, NAZAROV SAID. KHOMEINI HAD BEEN THE ONLY IRANIAN POLITICAL FIGURE WHO EXERCIZED A CONSISTENT LINE. THE FLIRTING WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD WHICH OTHER LEADERS HAD ENGAGED IN WOULD RE-EMERGE, BUT WHETHER IT WOULD LAST REMAINED UNPREDICTABLE.

¶19. THE CHOICE OF KHAMENEI AS KHOMEINI'S SUCCESSOR HAD BEEN TACTICAL, NAZAROV SAID, REPRESENTING A COMPROMISE BETWEEN THE RADICAL SPIRITUAL LEADERS AND THE PRAGMATISTS. IN ACCEPTING A LEADERSHIP ROLE, THOUGH, KHAMENEI WAS TAKING A RISK: WHEREAS IRANIANS HAD NOT BEEN WILLING TO CRITICIZE KHOMEINI'S LEADERSHIP OF THE COUNTRY, THERE WAS EVERY CHANCE THAT THEIR PENT-UP FRUSTRATIONS WOULD NOW BE UNLEASHED ON A LESS-IDOLIZED LEADER LIKE KHAMENEI.

¶10. KHAMENEI WAS TIED TO THE BAZAARIS, NAZAROV SAID, AND HAD CALLED FOR REDUCED GOVERNMENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN COMMERCIAL LIFE. LIKEWISE, HE HAD--AS SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE "PARTY OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC"--AT ONE TIME CALLED FOR A REDUCED POLITICAL ROLE FOR THE COUNTRY'S SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP. KHAMENEI HAD ALSO HELPED CREATE THE 25-MEMBER CONSTITUTIONAL REVIEW COUNCIL WHICH WAS PROPOSING TO EXPAND THE POWERS OF THE PRESIDENCY AND ABOLISH THE POST OF PRIME MINISTER. UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, NAZAROV SUGGESTED, KHAMENEI APPEARED TO FAVOR RAFSANJANI'S ELECTION TO THE POST OF A MORE POWERFUL PRESIDENCY, THEREBY FACILITATING IRAN'S RETURN TO A MORE PRAGMATIC, LESS SPIRITUALLY-INFLUENCED APPROACH. BUT MUCH DEPENDED ON WHEN THE COUNCIL WOULD MAKE ITS DECISIONS CONCERNING THE POWERS OF THE PRESIDENCY--NAZAROV COULD NOT ESTIMATE WHEN THIS WOULD BE--AND IN ANY CASE, AS RAFSANJANI'S CALL FOR THE DEATHS OF AMERICANS HAD DEMONSTRATED, THE ACTIONS OF EVEN A "MODERATE" IRANIAN POLITICAL FIGURE WERE ENTIRELY UNPREDICTABLE.

FOREIGN RELATIONS
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¶11. WHAT REMAINED CONSTANT, NAZAROV SAID, WAS IRAN'S DESPERATE NEED FOR FOREIGN ASSISTANCE TO EMERGE FROM ITS ECONOMIC CRISIS. MUCH OF THIS ASSISTANCE COULD ONLY COME FROM THE WEST, AS THE SOVIET UNION SIMPLY DID NOT HAVE THE WHEREWITHAL TO PROVIDE IT. THE SOVIETS WERE IN A POSITION, HOWEVER, TO BUY IRANIAN NATURAL GAS AND TO OFFER TRANSPORTATION ROUTES FOR THE GAS AND OTHER IRANIAN PRODUCTS.

¶12. BECAUSE THE SOVIETS WERE NOT PRESENTLY PERCEIVED AS A MAJOR THREAT BY IRAN, NAZAROV SAID, THE IRANIANS WERE ALSO INTERESTED IN RECEIVING AS MUCH POLITICAL SUPPORT AS POSSIBLE FROM THE USSR. THE "PRIMITIVE" IRANIAN CONCEPTION OF FOREIGN RELATIONS BROUGHT ABOUT BY THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION--IN WHICH OTHER NATIONS WERE EITHER FRIEND OR FOE-- WAS SLOWLY EVOLVING INTO SOMETHING MORE SOPHISTICATED.

RAFSANJANI VISIT
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¶13. NAZAROV SAID THE SOVIETS HAD RECEIVED NO WORD ON WHETHER RAFSANJANI WOULD CANCEL OR POSTPONE HIS JUNE 21 VISIT TO MOSCOW. GIVEN THAT DURING THE 40-DAY PERIOD OF MOURNING A DEVOUT FOLLOWER OF KHOMEINI WOULD BE EXPECTED TO REMAIN AT HOME AND GRIEVE, HOWEVER, THERE WAS A CLEAR POSSIBILITY THAT THE VISIT WOULD BE AT THE VERY LEAST POSTPONED, NAZAROV INDICATED.

DEFENSE COOPERATION
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¶14. IN A RECENT CONVERSATION, THE IRAQI AMBASSADOR (PROTECT) TOLD EMBOFF THAT VORONTSOV'S MAY 21 VISIT TO TEHRAN HAD PRODUCED SUSPICIONS THAT A MUTUAL DEFENSE AGREEMENT HAD BEEN SIGNED BETWEEN IRAN AND THE USSR. SUCH A DEVELOPMENT WOULD BE OF TREMENDOUS CONCERN TO THE IRAQIS, THE AMBASSADOR SUGGESTED, AND HE WAS TO SEE MFA NEAR EASTERN AND NORTH AFRICAN COUNTRIES ADMINISTRATION CHIEF POLYAKOV JUNE 6 AT 4 P.M. TO DISCUSS THE MATTER.

¶15. ASKED ABOUT SOVIET-IRANIAN DEFENSE COOPERATION, NAZAROV SAID THAT THE IRANIAN PRESS AGENCY STATEMENT ON THE VORONTSOV VISIT TOOK LIBERTIES WITH REALITY. THE TRUTH OF THE MATTER WAS THAT THE SOVIETS WERE PREPARED TO COOPERATE WITH IRAN IN A VARIETY OF SPHERES, WHICH WOULD NATURALLY INCLUDE MILITARY COOPERATION AS WELL. THIS IN NO WAY ENVISAGED A MUTUAL DEFENSE AGREEMENT, NAZAROV SAID. THE IRANIANS STILL VIEWED THE SOVIETS AS TOO MUCH OF A THREAT FOR THAT.

¶16. ARMS SALES WERE ANOTHER MATTER, HOWEVER, AND HE REITERATED ARGUMENTS OUTLINED IN REF (A) IN DEFENSE OF SUCH SALES. NAZAROV DISTINGUISHED BETWEEN WEAPONS SUCH AS MISSILES, WHICH WOULD BE PROVOCATIVE, AND FIELD ARTILLERY, WHICH HE DESCRIBED AS HAVING "LIMITED USES". HE PROVIDED NO FURTHER CLUE AS TO THE TIMING OF THE SALES, BUT ASSERTED THAT THE RAFSANJANI VISIT WOULD BE "TOO SOON" BECAUSE SOVIET PRODUCTION PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS WERE INVOLVED.

IRAN-IRAQ
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¶17. NAZAROV FORESAW NO IMMINENT CHANGE IN IRAN'S POLICY ON THE CONFLICT WITH IRAQ. A MAJOR CONSTRAINT UNDER WHICH ANY IRANIAN REGIME HAD TO OPERATE, HE SUGGESTED, WAS THE NEED TO ENSURE THAT IRAN'S POLICY ON TERRITORIAL DISPUTES WITH IRAQ DID NOT APPEAR WEAKER THAN THAT OF THE SHAH, WHO HAD CONSOLIDATED SOME OF IRAN'S CLAIMS.

AFGHANISTAN
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¶18. IN A MOMENT OF FRANKNESS, NAZAROV CONCEDED THAT THE IRANIANS WERE SPEAKING OUT OF BOTH SIDES OF THEIR MOUTHS WITH REGARD TO THEIR AFGHAN POLICY. IRAN WAS TELLING THE SOVIETS THAT AN AFGHAN POLITICAL SOLUTION HAD TO COMPRIZE ALL POLITICAL FORCES IN THE COUNTRY, WHEREAS THEY WERE TELLING THE AFGHAN RESISTANCE THAT NAJIB HAD TO GO BEFORE A SETTLEMENT COULD BE REACHED. THE SOVIET VIEW REMAINED THAT NAJIB INTENDED TO FIGHT TO THE BITTER END AND THAT ONLY A DECISION TO INCLUDE HIM IN THE NEGOTIATIONS OFFERED ANY HOPE FOR A SETTLEMENT. THE ALLIANCE OF EIGHT, HOWEVER, CONTINUED TO INSIST ON NAJIB'S DEPARTURE.

SOVIET POLICY-MAKING ON IRAN
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¶19. OSTALSKIY SUGGESTED THAT SOME SOVIET OFFICIALS--INCLUDING CERTAIN DEPUTIES TO THE CONGRESS OF PEOPLE'S DEPUTIES FROM THE MOSCOW REGION--DID NOT SHARE THE OFFICIAL VIEW THAT RELATIONS WITH IRAN

SHOULD BE FULLY NORMALIZED WHILE IRAN REMAINED EMBARKED ON ITS REVOLUTIONARY COURSE. HE SUGGESTED THAT SHEVARDNADZE HAD BEEN RELUCTANT TO MEET WITH KHOMEINI LAST FEBRUARY, AND PREFERRED TO DEAL WITH OTHER, "MORE NORMAL" MEMBERS OF THE IRANIAN LEADERSHIP.

¶20. OSTALSKIY SAID HE WAS ONE OF THOSE WHO CALLED FOR THE SOVIET UNION TO COORDINATE ITS APPROACH TO IRAN WITH THE UNITED STATES. HE ARGUED THAT IT WAS NOT IN THE SOVIET INTEREST FOR U.S.-IRANIAN RELATIONS TO BE ESTRANGED, AND THAT THE SOVIETS DID NOT INTEND TO SEEK ADVANTAGE FROM THE PRESENT SITUATION. OSTALSKIY WOULD NOT ELABORATE ON WHO IN THE "MOSCOW GROUP" OF DEPUTIES SHARED HIS VIEWS. ALTHOUGH FOR THE PRESENT THOSE VIEWS WERE CLEARLY IN THE MINORITY AS FAR AS OFFICIAL SOVIET POLICY WAS CONCERNED, OSTALSKIY SAW A TIME APPROACHING WHEN SOVIET LEGISLATORS WOULD DEBATE THIS AND OTHER FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES IN THE SUPREME SOVIET.

COMMENT
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¶21. DESPITE ANY PERSONAL EMBARRASSMENT WHICH SOVIET ASSOCIATION WITH REVOLUTIONARY IRAN MAY BE CAUSING SOVIET OFFICIALS AND JOURNALISTS, THE OFFICIAL SOVIET APPROACH CONTINUES TO BE AIMED AT CULTIVATING NORMALIZED RELATIONS WITH IRAN IN THE HOPE THAT WHOEVER EMERGES AT THE TOP FOLLOWING THE PROTRACTED LEADERSHIP STRUGGLE IN IRAN WILL BE A "PRAGMATIST". AS SOVIET OFFICIALS CONCEDED, HOWEVER, THIS TERM IN THE IRANIAN CONTEXT IS ONLY RELATIVE.

MATLOCK